

RECONSIDERATIONS OF CLASS: PRECARIOUSNESS AS PROLETARIANIZATION

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The positing of the individual as a *worker*,
in this nakedness, is itself a product of *history*.¹

Karl Marx

The experience of class conflict, proletarian mobilization, and class consciousness – so clearly visible in 1917–21, 1934–37, and 1946–48 – was very much on the 20th century's calendar again in the mid-1960s, when the *Socialist Register* was founded. Shop stewards movements and discussions of workers' control animated much of the left in the United Kingdom. With the Labour Party in power there was spirited debate aimed at developing a programme for socialist advance, as opposed to the reformist inclination of collapsing strategic sensibility into the cul-de-sac of an incomes policy.² In the United States and Canada rising discontent in labour circles took many forms. A mid-1960s wildcat wave was eventually tamed,³ but was soon followed, into the early 1970s, by much talk of 'blue collar blues' at General Motors plants like the sprawling assembly-line complex in Lordstown, Ohio.⁴ Detroit gave birth to the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.⁵ The Ben Hamper-designated 'Rivethhead' phenomenon of counter-planning on the shop floor was governed less in this period by an individualist credo of escape from work than it was by an edgy class antagonism.⁶ May 1968 had witnessed the coming together of workers and students in massive protests in France,⁷ while Edward Heath's governing Tories across the channel were toppled in 1974. An upsurge of class conflict in the first four years of the decade beat back anti-union legislation, broke a wage freeze and unleashed militant factory occupations in opposition to plant closures. Two miners' strikes – one in 1972, another in 1974 – finally sealed the fate of the Conservatives. They helped bring the Labour Party back into government, with the militant rhetoric of a 'fundamental shift in class power' advanced

by those in its ranks a source of visible discomfort to its tepid leadership.⁸

This 'moment' of class struggle, reaching from 1965-74 was, arguably, labour's last stand in the faltering economic climate of the post-World War II 'long boom' that was obviously winding down. For by the mid-1970s, the terms of trade in the class war had shifted. Working-class victories, registering in militant extra-parliamentary mobilizations of class struggle as well as the incremental creep of union densities that saw, over time, the percentage of the non-agricultural workforce associated with labour organizations climb to 35 per cent even in that bastion of ostensible 'exceptionalism', the United States, slowed, stalled, and sputtered. Oppositional political formations – Militant Tendencies, anarchist collectives and aspiring vanguards of 'new communists' – came into being, made their voices heard and then, all too often, disintegrated. The routine tempo of class conflict downshifted into a climacteric that would, over decades, see union densities plummet to one-third the percentage of earlier, better, times. Working-class combatants almost everywhere had the lifeblood of militancy sucked out of them, and confidence in labour circles waned as the advantage was seized by class adversaries. From 1975 to the present capital has rewritten the script of class relations in the developed capitalist economies of the west, using to good effect a series of deepening and ongoing crises to discipline not only labour, but all dissident forces, drawing on the myriad powers of the state and unleashing material and ideological assaults of unprecedented vigour.

The result: declining material standards of the working class as a whole; the domestication of a once combative trade unionism to a machinery of concession bargaining; a generation of young workers robbed of a sense of class place, its future marked by insecurity, with employment prospects understood to be precarious. Working-class defeats have, after decades of retrenchment, taken on a cumulative character, and the result is a class too often stripped of its seeming capacity to fight, its leadership increasingly characterized by caution and the sensibilities of an ossified officialdom. To be sure, there are, on a global scale, indications of class mobilizations that threaten to break out of these doldrums. Mike Davis writes, for instance, that 'two hundred million Chinese factory workers, miners and construction labourers are the most dangerous class on the planet. (Just ask the State Council in Beijing.) Their full awakening from the bubble may yet determine whether or not a socialist Earth is possible'.⁹ Davis's optimism is refreshing, but a certain pessimism may well also be in order. The class consciousness and appetite for militancy within the Chinese proletariat is subject to a number of constraints, including limitations on working-class agency characteristic of class relations forged in the cauldron of a Stalinist-Maoist state moving away

from its planned economy roots towards integration into a global capitalist order with which it has yet to fully align.

In any case, the developing world and the nature of its class formations certainly reinforces the contemporary significance of proletarian precariousness. The International Labor Organization has recently estimated that what might be called the global reserve army of labour is now larger than the approximately 1.4 billion workers who are totally dependent on wage labour for subsistence. This reserve now extends well beyond the roughly 218 million unemployed, an astronomical 1.7 billion workers being designated 'the vulnerably employed'. A significant portion of this reserve is undoubtedly wageless, composed of members of marginal domestic economies who eke out material being through unpaid labours, scavenging and other illicit endeavours of the kind associated with life in the favelas, barrios and shanty towns of Latin America, Asia and Africa. Often this segment of the dispossessed scratches its day-to-day remunerations out of an *informal* economy where the struggle for subsistence relies as much on the trappings of petty, self-exploiting entrepreneurialism as on anything approximating waged labour.¹⁰ Precariousness is axiomatic. What Davis calls the 'global informal working class' – a socio-economic stratum that he sees 'overlapping with but non-identical to the slum population' – now surpasses one billion in number, 'making it the fastest growing, and most unprecedented, social class on earth'.¹¹

But does precariousness, per se, constitute a *separate and distinct class formation*? If it does, then precarious employments, across a spectrum of almost infinite possibilities, are, in their fragmentations, constitutive of specific and particular classes, which then necessarily occupy different class places, with counterposed class interests, from those in other employment sectors. It is the purpose of this essay to suggest that this kind of thinking, which has of late gathered momentum, is antagonistic to foundational Marxist understandings and will, inevitably, have consequences in terms of struggle and practice which are divisive and counterproductive.¹²

PRECARIOUSNESS AS SOCIAL CLASS

Leading the analytic charge to declare precarious workers a *new class force*, one that must be reckoned with in the social struggles of our times, is Guy Standing. Standing, for instance, insists that in our current reconfigurations of work and everyday life 'the precariat is in the front ranks, but it has yet to find the voice to bring its agenda to the fore. It is not the "squeezed middle" or an "underclass" or "the lower working class". It has a distinctive bundle of insecurities and will have an equally distinctive set of demands.'¹³ Such

claims rest on understandings of a *hierarchy of differentiated class formation* in which a new neoliberal global economy has forever gutted both the old, drab, Fordist regime of factory-driven accumulation and the routine conception of employment as a nine-to-five undertaking, defined by continuous work relations which were ordered, in part, by union protections. Stable working-class identities have been swept aside; a sense of proletarian power as a transformative agent of social relations of exploitation and oppression is now ended.

This new instalment to what is by now over a three decades-old 'retreat from class'¹⁴ is ironically centred on insisting that old class structures and agencies have been replaced by new ones, albeit class formations that are defined by their distance from structures of class place and the many destabilizations that separate this new precarious class from all previous touchstones of working-class identity. Standing posits the existence of a ladder of stratification that orders the lower classes of contemporary society into distinct components: the manual working class; the army of the unemployed; the social misfits living a thoroughly marginalized existence; and the youth-dominated precariat.

Beyond the intellectual grid of Standing's Weberian/Lloyd Warnerian classifications lie a graveyard of political implications, in which are buried the possibilities of a past written off as *finis*. A sclerotic labourist politic, according to Standing, is simply antiquated in modern times, a residue of a tired social democracy, its affiliation with a dying labour movement little more than a hangover of a previous era. As a separate youth-led precariat emerges as a distinct class force, according to Standing, it will scale the heights of new mobilizations, creating struggles and corresponding slogans that leave older injunctions, such as 'Workers of the World, Unite!', discarded as useless impediments. The precariat is now the truly dangerous class, threatening disorder, a body of nomads coalescing under the banner, 'Denizens, Unite!' Insisting that with the dismantling of the public sector, the rising significance of black markets and generational tensions associated with the young resenting their elders living off of state subsidies, such as lavish pensions, the precariat is a unique and distinct class entity, Standing urges this powerful force to make the turn to utopianism, calling on all right-thinking advocates of multiculturalism to rally to its standard as a matter, almost, of natural selection. 'The precariat is not victim, villain, or hero', he writes, 'it is just a lot of us.'

Standing's response to capitalist crisis, the intensification of expropriation, the dismantling of working-class entitlements and the assault on the material well-being of the working class that manifests itself in a growing insecurity

of waged employment – all of which, and more, constitute a revived class war from above – is nothing less than an *ideology*. It is, to be sure, appealing in its simplified identification of the young, the restless and the insecure as the foundation of a new movement of resistance. Nonetheless, for all of its attractiveness to an increasingly volatile global sector of the working class, the end result of being drawn into this ideology will be to fragment the potential power of an amalgamation of the dispossessed by hiving off a sector of this class from all other components with whom this contingent might ally, thereby weakening the forces of anti-capitalism. The suggestion that class, its composition and its strategic importance, has somehow changed in the recent past, because work is no longer secure, represents a retreat into fragmentation, rather than a creative response to it. It is also a fundamentally ahistorical argument, for work has never been anything but a precarious foundation of life lived on the razor's edge of dispossession.

Claims of a new precariat class grow logically out of the 'post-Marxist postmodernism' that has, since the 1980s, revelled in study of marginality, repudiating the 'totalizing' master narratives of class and class struggle that animate the desire, not only to interpret the world, but to change it. The tragedy is that this ideological posture is likely to gain traction precisely because the established trade union leaderships have ossified to the point that they cannot reclaim the sensibility that prodded the labour movement into being, the understanding that 'An Injury to One is an Injury to All'. With the revolutionary left largely moribund, moreover, there are precious few forums in which class mobilizations are hailed as stepping stones in the creation of new organizations, parties and structures of opposition that can truly become 'tribunes of the people', expressions of the need to resist capitalist encroachments in the name of a wide-ranging, socialist agenda. Instead, there are European examples, like Portugal and Spain, where the marginally, casually and insecurely employed are an expanding and increasingly significant percentage of the working class (upwards of 40 per cent), exhibiting organizational initiatives (such as the formation of the *Precári@s Inflexíveis* Movement) that reflect this reality.¹⁵

For Marxists, the existence of such organization of the precariously employed is heartening. Yet this is no substitute for a powerful coming together of *all* components of the working class, which must be united in their struggles against capitalism and staunch in their refusals of division, driven by capitalism's conveniences rather than the needs of socialized humanity. In this sense, resisting the ideology of *precariousness as class formation* is a theoretical point of departure. Doing this necessitates going back to the original theoretical foundations of historical materialism, and addressing the

extent to which dispossession (from which flows all manner of insecurities and all manner of precariousness in the wage relation) has always been *the fundamental feature of class formation* rather than the material basis of a new, contemporary class, with an agenda silent on the necessity of socialism.

DISPOSSESSION AS SOCIAL CLASS: THE ORIGINS OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

In the 1873 Afterword to the second German edition of *Capital*, Marx declared that ‘the contradictions inherent in the movement of capitalist society impress themselves upon the practical bourgeois most strikingly in the changes of the periodic cycle, through which modern industry runs, and whose crowning point is the universal crisis. That crisis is once again approaching, although as yet but in its preliminary stage; and by the universality of its theatre and the intensity of its action it will drum dialectics even into the heads of mushroom upstarts’.¹⁶ Capitalist progress was thus premised on capitalist destruction. ‘The growing incompatibility between the productive development of society and its hitherto existing relations of production expresses itself in bitter contradictions, crises, spasms’, Marx wrote in the *Grundrisse*, concluding that, ‘the violent destruction of capital not by relations external to it, but rather as a condition of its self-preservation, is the most striking form in which advice is given it to be gone and give room to a higher state of social production’.¹⁷

Socialism, Marx and Engels reasoned, was necessary if humankind was ever to transcend the destructive logic of the profit system, which was ‘too narrow to comprise the wealth’ that it created:

And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand, by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented.¹⁸

Class formation, about which Marx wrote relatively little, was never separable from this understanding of *capitalism as crisis*. Earlier epochs had seen society fragmented into ‘various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank [composed of] ... patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves ... feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs’. Capitalism, in contrast, ‘simplified the class antagonisms’. Under the revolutionizing drive of the bourgeoisie, civil society was split into ‘two great hostile camps, into

two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat'. This was, for Marx and Engels, the fundamental socio-political fact of the human relations of capitalism. As much as the working classes, pluralized in the mainstream language of the epoch, were fragmented by identities of nationality, religion, morality and status, Marx and Engels insisted that the proletarians, recruited from all previous classes of the population, were finally brought together in inevitable association because of what they lacked: property. An original expropriation, generalized (sometimes over generations) to dispossession, defined the mass of humanity as inherently opposed to the propertied and powerful minority, and the isolations of labouring life would eventually give way 'to revolutionary combination'. Capitalism and the bourgeoisie had produced their 'own gravediggers'. This was fundamental to what Marx and Engels insisted was a process, spawned in all that was once solid melting into air, of men and women at last being 'compelled to face with sober senses' their 'real conditions of life'.¹⁹

In hindsight, and with an historical appreciation of the *longue durée* of class formation, it is clear that Marx and Engels wrote at a specific juncture, preceded by the dissolution of feudal relations and followed by the consolidation of increasingly structured capitalist social relations, of which differentiated labour markets were an integral part. To be sure, Marxist analysis of class relations necessarily addresses value, extraction of surplus and regimes of accumulation, but the prior (and always historically ongoing²⁰) process, on which all of this is premised, is necessarily expropriation and, in the long term, the continuity of dispossession. Thus, in Chapter 23 of *Capital*, Marx declares, in his discussion of simple reproduction and the relations of seigneurs and serfs, 'if one fine morning the lord appropriates to himself the land, the cattle, the seed, in a word, the means of production of this peasant, the latter will thenceforth be obliged to sell his labour power', while in Chapter 25, on 'the general law of capitalist accumulation', Marx criticized (but drew upon) Sir Fredrick Morton Eden's book, *The State of the Poor: Or, an History of the Labouring Classes of England* (1797). Against Eden's view that those emerging capitalists who commanded the produce of industry owed their exemption from labour 'to civilization and order', Marx argued that,

the reproduction of a mass of labour-power, which must incessantly re-incorporate itself with capital for that capital's self-expansion; which cannot get free from capital, and whose enslavement to capital is only concealed by the variety of individual capitalists to whom it sells itself, this reproduction of labour-power forms, in fact, an essential of the

reproduction of capital itself. Accumulation of capital is, therefore, increase of the proletariat.

Marx quoted the eighteenth-century satirist, philosopher and political economist, Bernard de Mandeville, who noted, 'it would be easier, where property is well secured, to live without money than without the poor; for who would do the work?' Dispossession, then, is the basis of all proletarianization, which orders accumulation. Only socialism can end this cycle of dispossession/accumulation/crisis/disorder, the partial and temporary resolution of which, under capitalism, can only be achieved by the bloodletting of another round of violent dispossession.²¹

DISPOSSESSION AS SOCIAL CLASS: WHAT'S PAST IS PRECARIOUSNESS

From the vantage point of Marx, schooled by Eden's marshalling of evidence and other sources, proletarianization flowed historically, a trickle that commenced in antiquity and had grown to a stream by the seventeenth century. Christopher Hill describes the masterless masses who provided the shock troops of Digger and Leveller contingents in the 1640s, the 'surplus' population that created the surplus out of which the capitalist class would coalesce. He refers to a

seething mobility of forest squatters, itinerant craftsmen and building labourers, unemployed men and women seeking work, strolling players and jugglers, pedlars and quack doctors, vagabonds, tramps: congregated especially in the big cities, but also with footholds wherever newly-squatted areas escaped from the machinery of the parish or in old-squatted areas where labour was in demand.

It was from this 'underworld' that ships' crews and armies were recruited, and out of which the migratory settlement that peopled the New World was fashioned.²²

By the mid-nineteenth century this stream of dispossession had become a torrential river of class formation, fed by underground currents of enclosures, wars, technological displacements of handicraft labours and other forces of expropriation and displacement. Marx and Engels can perhaps be excused for seeing proletarianization at this time as a maturing process, rather than one that was, in fact, only coming into its adolescence. In the decades that would follow, class formation would consolidate, indeed harden. Yet this would be an extremely uneven project, and never one in which anything

approximating 'stabilization' occurred. Dispossession was always disorderly: the old jostled with the new, layers of labour were structured into seemingly contradictory locales, with their designations running from the aristocratic (the black-coated worker) to the derogatory (the dangerous classes, the residuum).²³ And complicating this chaotic making and remaking of class experience was the potent disruption of capitalism's persistent underside: crisis.

A working class conceived as forged out of the process of dispossession is thus central, not only to the thought of Marx and Engels, but to the monumental achievement of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* which, in 2013, celebrated a fiftieth anniversary of its original date of publication. Indeed, Thompson explored the crucible of class formation in England in the years 1790–1830 by accenting how a mass of previously differentiated *employments*, in which variegated occupational labours evolved, had come, through struggle and crisis, to be a *working class*. He drew on Henry Mayhew, whose writings on London labour and the poor emerged at roughly the same time as the commentaries of Marx and Engels. Mayhew had suggested the extent to which the capitalist employment marketplace was structured in a series of arbitrary ways. It was dependent on work that could only be conducted seasonally, reliant on fashion and accident, ordered by over-work and scamp-work in the cheap trades, constantly reconfigured by the dilution of skills that saw women and children introduced into specific handicrafts in order to depress wages and restructured by machinery and managerial innovations. Recruited to the metropolis by the dissolution of landed relations and the destruction of village handicrafts, waged workers struggled, through time, with impersonal disciplines of a labour market always cramped by acute limitations. Mayhew concluded that regular employment was available to roughly 1.5 million labourers, while half-time work might accrue to a further 1.5 million, with 1.5 million more either wholly unemployed or working occasionally only by displacing those who considered specific jobs to be their terrain.

This might seem to be anything but a coherent grouping, the 'working classes' that it designated a 'bundle of discrete phenomena'. Thompson nevertheless argued that it was a *working class* that was indeed made in the cauldron of the Industrial Revolution and the counter-revolution of property, both historical processes either ridden forcefully or instigated by the bourgeoisie, and both either dependent upon or directed against those who were, increasingly, dispossessed of property and power over their lives. Class constituted an 'identity of interests ... of the most diverse occupations and levels of attainment', and it was forged in antagonism to the attempts to

make of all of these components 'a sort of machine'. If class was composed of various parts, drawn from a plethora of experiences of dispossession, both Marx's and Engels' and Thompson's understandings converged: all of these layers of class formation were drawn together, not so much because they had come from or were embedded in absolute sameness, but because their life courses were being determined by ultimately similar processes and outcomes.²⁴

The point, as a rich historiography reveals, and as is evident in Thompson's *Making*, with its accounts of proto-industrialization and outworkers, field labourers, declining crafts, 'Church and King mobs', opaque societies of machine-breakers, the denizens of 'Satan's Strongholds' and metropolitan artisans, is that there is nothing new about fragmentations of class experience. Class has always embodied differentiation, insecurity and precariousness. Just as precariousness is historically inseparable from class formation, there are invariably differentiations that seemingly separate out those with access to steady employments and secure payments from those who must scramble for work and access to the wage. Expropriation, then, is a highly heterogeneous experience, since no individual can be dispossessed in precisely the same way as another, or live that process of material alienation exactly as another would. Yet dispossession, *in general*, nonetheless *defines proletarianization*. It is the metaphorical mark of Cain stamped on all workers, regardless of their level of employment, rate of pay, status, waged placement or degree of wagelessness.²⁵

This has been a premise of much Marxist analysis, evident, for instance, in the (admittedly gendered) title of Martin Glaberman's essay on the American working class in the 1960s, 'Be His Payment High or Low'. Glaberman noted, decades ago, that 'what is involved in industry after industry is not simply the replacing of men by automated machines but the discarding of men, the moving of others and the bringing of still others into the industrial working class and the reorganisation of the work process'.²⁶ This kind of constant restructuring is precisely what animated Harry Braverman's concern with the degradation of work in the twentieth century.²⁷ Although, as Braverman argued, the process of change in the relations of production intensified in the twentieth-century age of monopoly, it had been around for decades. It astounded even early capitalists, who could not quite fathom the 'moral economy' of Adam Smith. 'It is vain to read his book to find a remedy for a complaint which he could not conceive existed, viz. 100,000 weavers doing the work of 150,000', wrote one humane English employer early in the nineteenth century. This man's inability to understand 'that the profits of a Manufacture should be what one Master could wring from the

hard earnings of the poor, more than another' led to his ruin.²⁸

It is in this context that capitalist crisis has become something of a fountainhead from which spring all manner of theoretical musings on new class formations. Capitalist crisis, for instance, ushered into being new class struggle initiatives on the part of the bourgeoisie. It has often called forth new tactics and strategic reassessments on the part of the working class. The *ahistorical* claim that the precariousness of modern labour is something dramatically new, necessitating a revision of all that has been solid in the Marxist approach to class, however, must be refused. Acknowledging the extent of precariousness in the contemporary trends of global class formation does *not* necessitate a conceptual and political rupture with understandings of the possibilities of a unity of the dispossessed, which remains the only hope for a socialist humanity.

PROLETARIAN SURPLUS, PRECARIOUSNESS AND PAUPERIZATION

A stable working class identity or, dichotomously, a precarious one – these are not the defining features of class difference, one designated *proletarian*, the other defined as *proletariat*. Rather, as a deep structure of being, dispossession itself is fundamental, and throughout history has been a continuous thread that ties together exploitation *and* oppression. Marx noted this in *Capital*, writing that capitalist enrichment was premised on 'the condemnation of one part of the working class to enforced idleness by the over-work of the other part', accelerating 'the production of the reserve army on a scale corresponding with the advance of social accumulation'. Every proletarian can thus be categorized, not so much according to their waged work, but to the possible forms of surplus population, which Marx labelled 'the floating, the latent, and the stagnant'. This is why the accumulation of capital is also the accumulation of labour, but the Malthusian multiplication of the proletariat does not necessarily mean the working class will, in its entirety, be waged. As Marx wrote:

The lowest sediment of the relative surplus-population finally dwells in the sphere of pauperism ... the quantity of paupers increases with every crisis. ... Pauperism is the hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army. Its production is included in that of the relative surplus population, its necessity in theirs; along with the surplus population, pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production, and of the capitalist development of wealth. It enters into the *faux frais* of capitalist production.²⁹

As John Bellamy Foster, Robert W. McChesney and R. Jamil Jonna note in a recent issue of *Monthly Review*, Marx's way of seeing class formation was much ahead of his time, anticipating how modern imperialism and the relentless march of capital accumulation on a world scale would result in the quantitative expansion and qualitative transformation of the global reserve army of labour.³⁰ This massive reserve, from which capital draws such sustenance for its accumulative appetite, now numbers in the billions, and as it has grown so too have the dimensions of misery of the dispossessed expanded, as Marx predicted.³¹ Jan Breman, writing of exploitation, expropriation and exclusion in India, declares 'a point of no return is reached when a reserve army waiting to be incorporated into the labour process becomes stigmatized as a permanently redundant mass, an excessive burden that cannot be included now or in the future, in economy and society. This metamorphosis is, in my opinion at least, the real crisis of world capitalism.'³²

What this suggests is that in any analytic grappling with the historical record of class formation, it is mandatory to see proletarianization whole. Historians are beginning to appreciate, as indicated by the interpretive excursions of Michael Denning into wagelessness and Mike Davis into slummification, that it is imperative not to centre our studies of labour in the logic of capital's validations. The working class does not only achieve visibility and become invested with political relevance to the extent that it is *waged*. Expropriation is being, and even in the throes of dispossession work is necessary for the vast majority of humanity, regardless of whether or how it is remunerated. Indeed, as feminists have long insisted in their accounts of unpaid reproductive labour, a perspective on class formation bounded only by the wage will inevitably be blinkered in all kinds of ways.³³

PRECARIOUSNESS AND THE LUMPENPROLETARIAT: THE POLITICS OF CLASS AFFILIATION

In circles uninfluenced by Standing's approach to the precariat as a separate social class there is nonetheless a congruent, if seemingly unrelated, interest in Marx's ostensible dismissiveness of precariousness, especially as it manifested itself in jaundiced comments on the lumpenproletariat. There is no doubt that, writing as a Victorian, Marx often lapsed into moralistic judgement with respect to the most marginalized, often criminalized, subcultures of the dispossessed. The further one gets from the core capitalist economies of the advanced capitalist western nations, the more apparent it is that class formation is often structured around wagelessness and subcultures of the marginally employed: transitions in and out of penny capitalism, criminality and hybrid existences in which peasant subsistence and temporary proletarianization

congeal are almost routine.

Historians interested in class formation on a world scale, and especially the importance of wagelessness in the developing world, have necessarily confronted the prejudice in selective comments by Marx on a class stratum he was prone to denigrate as the lumpenproletariat.³⁴ Nonetheless, for all that Marx (and Engels) can be castigated for the ‘political incorrectness’ of their comments on the lumpenproletariat, it is crucial to recognize that this loose term of abuse was situated within a particular context and was not necessarily a way of separating out one portion of the dispossessed from others in class terms. Given that Marx’s coining of the term lumpenproletariat was as much metaphorical trope as it was a rigorously developed analytic category, claims that Marx erred in writing out of the proletariat the criminalized and destitute who were divorced from the productive relations of developing capitalism may well be overstated. Indeed, a close reading of the entire oeuvre of Marx and Engels suggests four things.³⁵

First, even within the political writings of the 1840s, where there is no doubt that the term *lumpenproletariat* is used to designate derogatorily sectors of the dispossessed that cast their political lot with the project of reaction and restoration of class privilege, it is obviously the case that use of the prefix *lumpen* is meant to convey debasement rather than a hardened class place. This is evident in how Marx affixes the lumpenproletarian adjective to Bonaparte himself, who is the principal object of Marx’s revulsion in ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’ and *Class Struggles in France*. Bonaparte was metaphorically castigated as the princely ‘chief of the *lumpenproletariat*’, a scoundrel who recognized in the ‘scum, offal, refuse of all classes the only class upon which he [could] base himself unconditionally’.³⁶ One literary theorist has commented that ‘Marx must have lived the history of France from 1848 to 1852 – the revolution careening backwards – as resembling nothing so much as a latrine backing up’.³⁷ Understanding this, it would seem, might temper the ways in which contemporary scholarship evaluates the birth of a term such as lumpenproletariat, which truly did enter the world amidst the death agonies of revolutionary possibility. As Hal Draper has suggested, Marx’s utilization of the prefix ‘lumpen’ was a way of labelling an individual or a social grouping as knave-like or odious,³⁸ and this means, I would suggest, that the term is far less a rigorous classification of analytic substance than it is an adjective of vitriol. This surfaces in Marx’s pillorying of a particular kind of mid-nineteenth-century French financial aristocracy, a rakish layer of bourgeois society that is presented as having risen to commanding, parasitic heights, gorging itself on wealth produced by others, exhibiting an ‘unbridled display of unhealthy and dissolute appetites’.

Such an aristocratic layer, characterized by pleasure becoming ‘*crapuleux*, where gold, dirt, and blood flow together’, was, in Marx’s view, ‘nothing but the resurrection of the lumpen proletariat at the top of bourgeois society’.³⁹

Second, in as much as this debasement is, in the passions of an 1848–51 defeat of working-class revolution, Marx’s way of locating how sectors of the dispossessed opted to struggle in ways that secured the privileges of power and money rather than challenging them, the central issue in approaching the lumpenproletariat must be a consideration of how the lowest of the low act in moments of class struggle. Even Fanon – whose validation of the ‘pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed, and the petty criminals’ as a revolutionary contingent seems at odds with Marx’s less salubrious approach to people identified in this way – understood that colonial authority might well be ‘extremely skilful in using [the] ignorance and incomprehension of the *lumpenproletariat*’. Unless organized by revolutionary activists, Fanon feared that the lumpenproletariat would ‘find itself fighting as hired soldiers side-by-side’ with the troops of reaction, and he cited instances in Angola and the Congo where precisely this had indeed happened.⁴⁰

Third, even when he is, as in the writings relating to France between 1848–51, disparaging the lumpenproletariat as a force of reaction, Marx hints at the extent to which the sectors of the dispossessed were not so much acting as a distinct class apart from the proletariat, but were, rather, individuals *directed* in this way by bourgeois forces. When Marx writes in *The Class Struggles in France* that the 24 battalions of the Mobile Guards were set up by the Provisional Government, and that they were (rightly or wrongly) composed of young men from 15 to 20 years of age who ‘belonged for the most part to the *lumpenproletariat*’, he prefaces this reading of historical development with the statement that it came about because of bourgeois need.⁴¹ With the bourgeoisie no ‘match for the proletariat’ in 1848, it embarked on establishing ‘a hundred different obstacles’ to curb working-class power. When these efforts failed ‘there consequently remained but one way out: to set one part of the proletariat against the other’, a conclusion that can certainly be interpreted as acknowledgement that Marx did not consider the lumpenproletariat and the proletariat as irreconcilably divided, but part of a continuum of the same dispossessed class. But consciousness of class place/interests is never simply a *fait accompli*. Because this must be built, and is part of the project of making socialism by making socialists, it is possible, in periods of intense struggle to see individuals cross class lines and act in ways that pit them against members of their class. The language of antagonism is then often quite harsh, as the designation ‘scab’ reveals.

Fourth, in as much as Marx never wrote the decisive volume on labour

that might well have at least addressed, if not clarified, the meaning of lumpenproletarianization, it is surely critical to acknowledge that Marx's perspective shifted gears through and over time. His assessment of the lumpenproletariat reached, to be sure, something of a nadir with Bonaparte's coup d'état, orchestrated by the so-called Society of December 10, composed, in Marx's words, of

ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie ... vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, *lazzaroni*, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, *maquereaux*, brothel-keepers, porters, *litterati*, organ-grinders, rag-pickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars – in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French term *la bohème*.⁴²

This rhetoric of revulsion notwithstanding, there are passages in both earlier and later writings, distanced from the immediacy of Marx's 1848–51 political disappointment, that exhibit a more analytic understanding. As Peter Haynes suggests, Marx recognized well the ways in which the dispossessed were victimized by capitalism's capacity to criminalize and punish the poor. In later writings, Marx drew explicitly on Thomas More, for instance, whose *Utopia* was a source utilized in the writing of *Capital*, and who had represented the dispossessed as 'dryven to this extreme necessitie, firste to steale, then to dye'.⁴³

For all that Marx and Engels could write in the pejorative language of their times about what would later be called 'the underclass',⁴⁴ they were also not unaware of how the 'residuum' was reciprocally related to the stalwart proletarians on whom they based their hope for socialism. Engels' *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* had much of moralistic condemnation in it, especially with respect to immigrant Irish labour, but this did not mean that he saw the most downtrodden sectors of the proletariat as irredeemably separated out from the working class. Indeed, in an 1892 preface to his Manchester study, Engels recorded with considerable optimism the extent to which socialism's advance in England had registered even in a former bastion of lumpenproletarianization, London's East End. 'That immense haunt of misery is no longer the stagnant pool that it was six years ago', Engels wrote. 'It has shaken off its torpid despair, has returned to life, and has become the home of what is called the "New Unionism"', he continued, adding, 'that is to say the organisation of the great mass of "unskilled" workers'.⁴⁵

Marx understood well, as Michael Denning has recently noted, that

political economy ... does not recognize the unemployed worker, the workingman, insofar as he happens to be outside this labour relationship. The rascal, swindler, beggar, the unemployed, the starving, wretched and criminal workingman – these are *figures* who do not exist *for political economy* but only for other eyes, those of the doctor, the judge, the gravedigger, and bum-bailiff, etc.; such figures are spectres outside its domain.⁴⁶

Marx, of course, also had considerable empathy for what was *done to* the dispossessed, as is more than evident in his condemnation of the ‘barbarity in the treatment of the paupers’ and his recognition of the ‘growing horror in which the working people hold the slavery of the workhouse’, which he dubbed a ‘place of punishment for misery’.⁴⁷ In his 1842–43 *Rheinische Zeitung* articles on the debates in Germany over the law on the theft of wood, moreover, there is ample suggestion that Marx appreciated the ways in which capitalism’s socio-economic trajectory tended in the direction of wider criminalization of behaviours of the poor that were themselves critical to the survival of the dispossessed. Separated first from nature, the dispossessed then found themselves expropriated from the institutionalized protections of civil society.

State formation, in Marx’s view, proceeded on this basis: ruling-class power and institutions subservient to such authority’s ends made the law into a vehicle driving forward the expanding nature of dispossession, turning the apparatus of governance into a mailed fist of privileged interests. As Peter Linebaugh pointed out in the mid-1970s, Marx’s writings on the thefts of wood provide a jumping off point for a discussion of class formation that necessitates analysis of the meaning of Marxist understandings of the lumpenproletariat, a term that can only be interrogated when ‘the principle of historical specification’ and ‘the concept of class struggle’ are central to analysis.⁴⁸ In discussing the issue of access to the fallen wood of the forest, Marx contended that ‘just as it is not fitting for the rich to lay claim to alms distributed in the street, so also in regard to these *alms of nature*’, and he insisted on the need for a universal set of ‘customary rights of the poor’.⁴⁹ Needless to say, nothing of the sort materialized in the cauldron of capitalist class formation, and Marx concluded that the state had been turned into a servant of property.

Marx thus addressed proletarianization as a dual process, the creation of labour as both ‘free’ *and* outlawed.⁵⁰ But if there is honour among *some* thieves, not all who have been placed beyond the boundary of respectability exhibit admirable traits.⁵¹ Marx appreciated, in a way that many contemporary scholars who romanticize segments of society driven to

incorrigibility fail to discern, that extreme and long-term dispossession could well deform a section of the proletariat politically, reducing it to an adjunct of reaction. This matter was still being posed in the 1930s, with activists and Left Book Club authors such as Wal Hannington, a founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and organizer of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, asking worriedly, 'Is there a Fascist danger amongst the Unemployed?'⁵²

Debates over lumpenproletarianization, like discussions of precariousness, highlight the reality of status differentiation within the dispossessed, illuminating the importance of conscious identifications on the plane of class struggle politics among sectors of the working class. As difficult as is the project of uniting the expropriated, many of whom can be incorporated into the hegemonic and ideological edifice of acquisitive individualism, this can never be the foundation of a materialist separation of layers of the dispossessed into distinct classes.

CLASS POLITICS AND PRECARIOUSNESS

Expropriation is not in and of itself a guarantee of behaviours that will advance humanity. It is in uniting the dispossessed in struggles that can realize a new social order, one premised not on expropriation, exploitation and oppression, but on collective productions for the use and benefit of all, that constitutes the only possibility for meaningful progress.

On a global scale, dispossession is accelerating. A crisis-ridden capitalism necessarily intensifies expropriation and expands the boundaries of immiseration. The necessity of orchestrating a collective response to this quickening pace of material alienation is most urgent, yet analytic thought in our times trends in the direction of accenting the fragmentations and divisions that incapacitate the working class, in all its gradations, rather than forging it into a fighting tribune for all of the world's exploited and oppressed. At its most populist, such thought, articulated most clearly by Guy Standing, stresses the unique constellation of a new class force, the *precariat*. Radical revisionists, animated by the need to address class formation on a global scale and cognizant of the importance of marginalization in the making of the world's proletariat, have turned away from some of Marx's insights, fracturing the experience of the waged and the wageless, questioning Marx's failure to create a sense of class premised on inclusivity.

These developments, largely confined at this point to theoretical discussions and academic treatises, are nevertheless paralleled in the actual world of class politics and praxis by a deepening structural and institutional separation of the fragments of the working class. Trade unions atrophy,

both in terms of their capacity to organize labour, and with respect to their willingness to put forward a politics of class that extends past the constrictions of business unionism, which focuses narrowly on specific occupational jurisdictions of waged employments. The revolutionary left, never weaker over the course of the last century than it is now, is a tragically understated presence in contemporary class relations, and has been usurped, as a critical political voice, by identity-driven social movements that reproduce the fragmentations inherent in capitalism's tendency to divide the better to conquer. And the working class appears as more and more fractured, divided against itself, and less and less able to utilize the precarious conditions of its material life to sustain structures of resistance.

Understanding this tragic set of parallel trajectories, it is imperative that those on the socialist left – as well as those working in unions, social movements, and all manner of campaigns that see themselves challenging capital and the state in the interests of the dispossessed – reassert what is most solid in the Marxist tradition. What is more than ever needed is a politics of class that speaks directly to the betterment of humanity through insistence that the expropriated are as one in their ultimate needs. The reciprocal powers (however subjectively and seemingly different) of the waged and the wageless must be organized and utilized to speak to the debilitating consequences of precariousness as well as the exploitative nature of all productions, payments and prohibitions. Transcending an imposed and ultimately artificial difference is central to breaking the chains that keep workers separated from their collectivity, and bind them to the isolations that seal their subordination. In the recent words of the East European dissident, G.M. Tamás, '*Vive la difference? No. Vive la Commune!*'⁵³

Once it is grasped that all proletarians suffer precariousness, and all of those constrained by precariousness in their working lives are indeed proletarians or have interests that coincide directly with this class of the dispossessed, it is clear that there are expanding possibilities for more effective politics based on class struggles in our times. And it is indeed class struggle – rooted in expropriation and forged in the increasingly agitated crises of capitalism – that remains the ultimate basis for changing the world through a transformative politics.

NOTES

- 1 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p. 472.
- 2 See, for instance, the discussions of 'Incomes Policy' by A.J. Topham, 'Background to the Argument', Ken Coates, 'A Strategy for the Unions', and Ralph Miliband, 'What Does the Left Want', *Socialist Register 1965*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965, pp. 163-94; as well as Richard Hyman, 'Workers' Control and Revolutionary Theory', *Socialist Register 1974*, London: Merlin Press, 1974, pp. 241-78.
- 3 Bryan D. Palmer, 'Wildcat Workers: The Unruly Face of Class Struggle', *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, pp. 211-41.
- 4 Barbara Garson, 'Luddites in Lordstown', *Harper's Magazine*, June, 1972, pp. 68-73; Judson Gooding, 'Blue-Collar Blues on the Assembly Line', *Fortune*, July, 1970, pp. 112-3; Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, New York and London: New Press, 2010.
- 5 James A. Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- 6 Bill Watson, 'Counter-planning on the Shop Floor', *Radical America*, May-June, 1971; and Ben Hamper, *Rivthead: Tales from the Assembly Line*, Boston: Warner, 1991.
- 7 Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*, Boston: South End Press, 2002; Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- 8 On class conflict see Richard Hyman, 'Industrial Conflict and the Political Economy', *Socialist Register 1973*, London: Merlin, 1973, pp. 101-54, which surveys the 1960s and early 1970s. Note, on the 1972 miners' strike, E.P. Thompson, 'A Special Case', *Writing by Candlelight*, London: Merlin, 1980, pp. 65-76. See also, L. Panitch, *Social Democracy and Industrial Militancy*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976, 204-34.
- 9 Mike Davis, 'Spring Confronts Winter', *New Left Review*, 72(November-December), 2011, p. 15. See also Kwan Lee, *Against the Law: Labour Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007.
- 10 Early comment on the growing significance of the informal economy appeared in Manfred Bienefeld, 'The Informal Sector and Peripheral Capitalism', *Bulletin of the Institute of Development Studies*, 4, 1975, pp. 53-73; and the importance of this informal sector in terms of African class formation is much discussed in Bill Freund, *The African Worker*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- 11 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, New York and London: Verso, 2006, p. 178.
- 12 Not all recent writing on precariousness is wrong-headed. Although approaching the issue from an entirely different vantage point than the current essay, addressing precarity from a cultural studies perspective and placing far more emphasis on 'the knowledge economy', 'creative industries' and 'cultural revolutions', Andrew Ross refuses both the suggestion that a precariat is necessarily a cross-class formation and that there is nothing to unite those in

- work sectors associated with the traditional, unionized proletariat and those who find themselves in more precarious employments. See his *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times*, New York and London: New York University Press, 2009.
- 13 Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011. For the quotations in this and the following paragraphs, see esp. pp. vii, 8-9, 154, 159, 183.
 - 14 Note, for instance, Ellen Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism*, London: Verso, 1986; and Leo Panitch, 'The Impasse of Working Class Politics', *Socialist Register 1985/6*, London: Merlin, 1986; as well as the subsequent essays on 'The Retreat of the Intellectuals', *Socialist Register 1990*, London: Merlin, 1990.
 - 15 See Ricard Antunes, 'The Working Class Today: The New Form of Being of the Class Who Lives from its Labour', *Workers of the World: International Journal on Strikes and Social Conflict*, 1(2), January, 2012.
 - 16 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, Volume 1, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d., p. 20.
 - 17 Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 749-50.
 - 18 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow: Progress, 1968, pp. 36-46.
 - 19 Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto'.
 - 20 See Bryan D. Palmer, 'Social Formation and Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century North America', in David Levine, ed., *Proletarianization and Family History*, New York: Academic Press, 1984, pp. 229-308.
 - 21 Marx, *Capital*, pp. 568, 612-6. See also, Marx, *Grundrisse*, esp. pp. 483-509.
 - 22 Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution*, New York: Viking, 1972, p. 39.
 - 23 The literature that could be cited is immense, and for London alone is benchmarked between 1850 and 1890 by the pioneering sociological inquiries of Henry Mayhew and Charles Booth. See, for other useful commentary, Raphael Samuel, 'Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in Mid-Victorian Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 3, 1977, pp. 6-72; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971; and for France, Louis Chevalier, *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Howard Fertig, 1973; Robert Stuart, *Marxism at Work: Ideology, Class and French Socialism during the Third Republic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 127-79.
 - 24 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, esp. pp. 9-11, 276-7, 887-8. This is not to deny what Thompson would later stress, and that is congruent with subsequent writings of Michael Lebowitz and David Harvey, that Marx, in his fixation on creating an *anti-structure* counterposed to the structure of conventional Political Economy, failed to adequately theorize class formation as something other than the object of capital's accumulative appropriation of surplus. See E.P. Thompson, *The*

- Poverty of Theory & Other Essays*, London: Merlin, 1981, pp. 60–5; Michael Lebowitz, *Beyond 'Capital': Marx's Political Economy of the Working Class*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; Lebowitz, *Following Marx: Method, Critique, and Crisis*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009, pp. 308–11; David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 163.
- 25 For a useful attempt to wrestle with the ever-present tension between 'universalist' and 'exceptionalist' understandings of labour see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal, 1890–1940*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, esp. pp. 219–30.
 - 26 Martin Glaberman, 'Be His Payment High or Low: The American Working Class in the Sixties', *International Socialism*, 21(Summer), 1965, pp. 18–23. Glaberman, of course, drew directly on Marx: 'It follows, therefore, that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse'. *Capital*, p. 645.
 - 27 Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1974.
 - 28 Quoted in Thompson, *Making*, p. 309.
 - 29 Marx, *Capital*, pp. 641, 643–4.
 - 30 John Bellamy Foster, Robert W. McChesney and R. Jamil Jonna, 'The Global Reserve Army of Labor and the New Imperialism', *Monthly Review*, 63(November), 2011, available at <http://monthlyreview.org>.
 - 31 Marx, *Capital*, p. 644–5.
 - 32 Jan Breman, *The Labouring Poor in India: Patterns of Exploitation, Subordination, and Exclusion*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 13.
 - 33 Particular contributions to this literature were made by Canadian feminists. See Meg Luxton, *More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home*, Toronto: Women's Press, 1980; Bonnie Fox, *Hidden in the Household: Women's Domestic Labour Under Capitalism*, Toronto: Women's Press, 1980; Michèle Barrett and Roberta Hamilton, eds., *The Politics of Diversity: Feminism, Marxism, and Nationalism*, London and New York: Verso, 1986.
 - 34 See, for instance, Michael Denning, 'Wageless Life', *New Left Review*, 66(November–December), 2010, pp. 79–87; Marcel Van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labor History*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008, pp. 10, 22–7, 267, 298; Van der Linden, 'Who are the Workers of the World? Marx and Beyond', *Workers of the World: International Journal on Strikes and Social Conflicts*, 1, January, 2013, pp. 55–76. Unease with Marx's seeming dismissiveness of the so-called lumpenproletariat has long been evident among Africanists, and was posed forcefully in Peter Worsley, 'Frantz Fanon and the "Lumpenproletariat"', *Socialist Register 1972*, London: Merlin, 1972, pp. 193–229.
 - 35 See especially Hal Draper, 'The Lumpen-Class versus the Proletariat', *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: The Politics of Social Classes, Volume II*, New York: Monthly Review, 1978, pp. 453–80. Draper's discussion is informed and invaluable, and contains many important insights and analytic nuances. Nonetheless, while I draw on this account I also depart from some of its claims.

- 36 Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, p. 44.
- 37 Jeffrey Mehlman, *Revolution and Repetition: Marx/Hugo/Balzac*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1977, pp. 24-5.
- 38 Draper, *Marx's Theory of Revolution*, esp. pp. 628-34.
- 39 Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France (1848-1850)*, New York: International, n.d., p. 36.
- 40 Quoted in Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, London: Macmillan, 1978, p. 385, which has a useful discussion of 'The Wretched of the Earth', pp. 381-9. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove, 1966, pp. 103-9.
- 41 Marx, *Class Struggles in France*, p. 50.
- 42 Marx, 'Eighteenth Brumaire', p. 138. On Marx, the lumpenproletariat and the economic analysis of *Capital*, see Draper, *Marx's Theory of Revolution*, pp. 469-71.
- 43 Peter Hayes, 'Utopia and the Lumpenproletariat: Marx's Reasoning in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte"', *The Review of Politics*, 50(Summer), 1988, esp. p. 458.
- 44 The 'underclass', an early twentieth-century sociological designation that would be excavated in Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971, is not unrelated to the continuity of precariousness in proletarian life.
- 45 Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892. Six years earlier Engels had written in correspondence to Laura Lafargue and August Bebel in ways that suggested a problem in seeing 'barrow boys, idlers, police spies, and rogues' as sources of support for socialism. He referred to 'numbers of poor devils of the East End who vegetate in the borderland between working class and lumpen proletariat'. Engels to Laura Lafargue, 9 February 1886; Engels to August Bebel, 15 February 1886, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 47, 1883-1886*, New York: International, 1995, pp. 403-10. See, also, Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*; and Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago*, London: Methuen, 1896.
- 46 Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 3, 1843-1844*, New York: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975, p. 284.
- 47 Among many passages that might be cited see Marx, *Capital*, pp. 653-4; as well as the following discussions of 'The Badly Paid Strata of the British Industrial Working Class', pp. 654-63, 'The Nomad Population', pp. 663-7, and 'The British Agricultural Proletariat', pp. 673-712.
- 48 See Karl Marx, 'Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly. Third Article Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood', in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 1: 1835-1843*, Moscow: Progress, 1975, pp. 224-63; Teo Ballvé, 'Marx: Law on Thefts of Wood', 12 July 2011, available at <http://territorialmasquerades.net>; Peter Linebaugh, 'Karl Marx, the Theft of Wood, and Working Class Composition: A Contribution to the Current Debate',

Crime and Social Justice, 6(Fall-Winter), 1976, pp. 5-16; Erica Sherover-Marcuse, *Emancipation and Consciousness: Dogmatic and Dialectical Perspectives in the Early Marx*, New York: Blackwell, 1986.

- 49 See also Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- 50 Marx, *Capital*, p. 733; and Van der Linden, *Workers of the World*, p. 27.
- 51 For sober cautionary assessment of the extent to which precarious work in the informal sector, so obviously central to the developing global South, and not unrelated to understandings of lumpenproletarianization, might well prove an 'unlikely source of sustained or coherent resistance to an unjust order', see Freund, *African Worker*, pp. 79-81; Robin Cohen and D. Michael, 'Revolutionary Potential of the African Lumpenproletariat: A Sceptical View', *Bulletin of the Institute of Development Studies*, 5, 1976, pp. 31-42.
- 52 Wal Hannington, *The Problem of the Distressed Areas*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1937, pp. 233-50.
- 53 G.M. Tamás, 'Words from Budapest', *New Left Review*, 80(March-April), 2013, p. 26.